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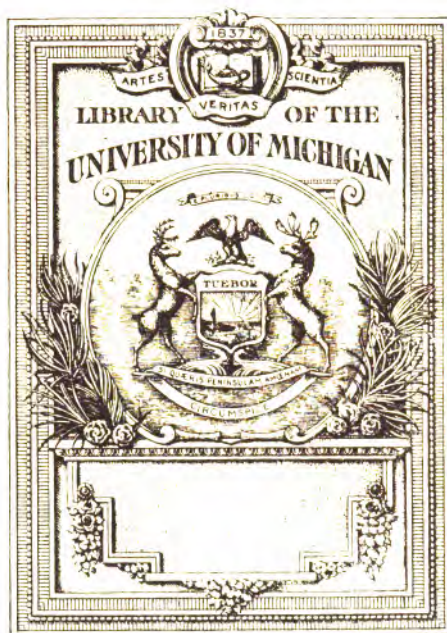
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William's Lincoln Birthplace farm at Hodgenville, Ky.



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LINCOLN BIRTHPLACE FARM AT HODGENVILLE, KY.

ADDRESS

DELIVERED ON THE

OCCASION OF THE ACCEPTANCE OF
A DEED OF GIFT TO THE NATION
BY THE LINCOLN FARM ASSOCIATION
OF THE LINCOLN BIRTHPLACE FARM
AT HODGENVILLE, KY.

BY

HON. JOHN SHARP WILLIAMS

UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM MISSISSIPPI

SEPTEMBER 4, 1916



PRESENTED BY MR. FLETCHER

SEPTEMBER 7, 1916.—Ordered to be printed

WASHINGTON
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1916

GIFT OF LINCOLN BIRTHPLACE FARM AT HODGENVILLE, KY.

ADDRESS OF HON. JOHN SHARP WILLIAMS, UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM
MISSISSIPPI.

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

The presentation and acceptance of this generous gift, which is really made to the Nation and the people of the United States, whose servants we all are—the President being Chief only—is fraught not only with memories but with meanings too many and too various for one man's expression.

Abraham Lincoln was born in yonder little log cabin. He was not the first nor the only one of our great men to be thus humbly born. He sprang from that poorer class of southern white people whence sprang also Patrick Henry, Henry Clay, Andrew Jackson, and so many others whose names illustrate on the pages of our history the fact that those of humblest origin in a free democracy of equal opportunities can and often do reach the very highest station.

Lincoln was not "the first American," as has been said of him. There were preceding him, even in the presidential chair, others who were not colonials of any European people, but thoroughly and altogether American—typical Americans, each in his own way.

He was more than "the first American," however. He was one of the greatest Americans. The tide of time, which has buried animosities and prejudices, has left every reflecting and just mind free, and yet compelled, to draw that conclusion. He was great, not in the way that Alexander of Macedon or Napoleon of Corsica was, but in a better way. His was not the greatness of genius, nearly always selfish. His was the greatness of common sense and tenderness. It consisted fundamentally in intellectual and moral humility and in intellectual and moral integrity, which salient characteristics enabled him to furnish to the world a spectacle scarcely if ever excelled of self-subordination to the interests, the welfare, the unity of the Republic; and, more characteristically perhaps yet, of self-surrender to an enlightened public opinion, the growth of which he shared and studied, the tendency of which he cautiously and wisely guided, and the consummation of which into deed he at the right moment effected. He never went so fast that the common sense and the common conscience of the common people could not keep measurably apace, nor did he ever go so slowly that these left him stranded on the shore while they passed beyond him under other and quicker and abler navigators. In other words, he was like all the great human instrumentalities of Providence—a part and parcel of the growing form and texture of the time, unconsciously following and consciously directing American public sentiment, as this came

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naturally or was forced by inevitable circumstances into existence. This enlightened public opinion, for which he had "a decent respect," constituted then, as always, the only real controlling force and sovereign power in a country whose people are free and self-governing.

Horace Greeley once accused him of being an opportunist. So are and must be all real statesmen in free countries. They weigh opportunity and measure its strength; but they also help to create it and then seize *the* opportunity to effect the desired result. This is sagacity as contradistinguished from "smartness." They are opportunists, but they are more.

Lincoln was in this and some other respects singularly like that other great American, Thomas Jefferson. Both of them were idealists in the closet and statesmen in office. There was no limit to the visions which either had of what Jefferson called "the indefinite perfectibility of human nature," nor to their confidence in the progress and enlightenment of man under rightly constituted popular government, founded on an enlightened and educated public opinion. Both were democrats and both believed in the aristocracy of intelligence as the only aristocracy recognizable by freemen. Many dreams which either had have come true. Many more are yet in the womb of fate, certain later to come forth. Yet neither in office ever attempted to force upon the country any result for which a considerable and probably prevailing public opinion was not ready. They attempted to pluck, when in charge of the orchard, no fruit until the fruit was either ripe or ripening, and above all their purpose was not to kill or even harm the tree. Hence both are accused by men of little minds of "inconsistency." It is to be noted, however, that neither ever really "deserted a principle or a friend," as Jefferson's daughter proudly said of her father.

No two men who have figured conspicuously in molding the destinies of the English-speaking race ever equaled these two in their abiding, patient, and loving reliance upon the rectitude of the purposes of the people and in unswerving faith in the wisdom of their ultimate decision. Lincoln never tired of professing himself a disciple of Jefferson. He went so far at one time as to say that the vital spirit—that is, the birth principle—of American institutions was to be found in the Declaration of Independence and not in the Constitution of the United States. On no fundamentally great question did they ever materially differ, not even about slavery, not even about the relations which should exist between the two races in the event of negro emancipation. Between the two the chief difference was one of personal temperament; Lincoln, of the two, lived very much more within himself. He was, spiritually speaking, a lonesome man, sadly so, but throwing about himself a veil of anecdote and humor—sometimes rough humor—which served as a shield to ward off intrusion. Hidden behind this veil was not only serious but pathetic and nearly always solitary thought. Hence that indescribable mixture of humor and pathos which we find in him, as in Shakespeare and Cervantes.

Mr. Jefferson, on the contrary, was frequently witty, but had no sense of humor at all, and seemed to take a sort of delight in letting all the world see every process of his thought, as though through a window glass.

It is trite now to say that every man in this world is the product of two things—his heredity and his environment. Unlike plants and irrational creatures, however, man is not altogether the product of either or of both. While his environment makes him, he helps to make his environment—can even somewhat change it by conscious purpose. Moreover, while he can not repress, nor reverse, he may influence the tendencies of his heredity even.

Lincoln's family we all know about. There was very little stimulating in its influence. It furnished rather a platform to rise from than a standard to live up to.

Likewise his early environment was, to say the least, discouraging; there was little in it to evoke ambition, or to encourage, "hoping through hope to reach the stars."

But he rose from the platform; he reached the stars.

Within almost modern big-gun shot distance from where we now stand Jefferson Davis was born.

Both of these men were "border State" men, Kentuckians; both of them came from pioneer ancestry who had fought for American freedom and had braved the dangers and endured the isolation of the wilderness. It is a curious reflection, though there be not time to indulge in it here and now, as to how far each of these men's future—his political philosophy, the sectional patriotism of each, his leaning to nationality on the one side or to State rights on the other—might have been altered, mayhap reversed, had Jefferson Davis's family moved him into Indiana and then into Illinois, and had Abraham Lincoln's family moved him first into Louisiana and then into Mississippi. However interesting that inquiry may be, the reverse occurred. Davis became a very extreme southerner; Lincoln never became a very extreme northerner. The men were very much unlike, and yet both were alike in possessing the cardinal human virtues—truthfulness, moral and intellectual honesty, courage, loyalty to ideals. There was, too, somewhat of inflexibility about both, though in one case the inflexibility, while knightly, was stern, logical, unyielding, unhumorous, and even proud; while in the other case it was modified by humility and a rich sense of humor, from which flowed that wonderful capacity for "making allowances," that broad knowledge of an opposite's way of looking at things, that sympathetic appreciation of the moods and ways of thinking and the ways of feeling of the untaught and unenriched masses of mankind.

With Davis there were no laughter-inciting "sidelights on himself and others and their relations to one another" to relieve even temporarily the tension of a fixed and absorbing purpose. Lincoln was never without them. By being never without them he made lesser men, like Stanton, for example, "very impatient."

Davis became the very type of the best plantation life of the extreme South. As a part and parcel of that life he consecrated himself to his section, whose very civilization and social order he thought to be menaced. Lincoln consecrated himself to the Nation. Both endured nobly to the very end, each steadfastly "keeping the faith."

Lincoln remained all his life a borderer. In his temperament he came very much nearer that of the southerner than that of the New Englander, or the New Yorker, or Pennsylvanian. No theory of any sort would ever have led him into that gross violation of common

